

Statement of Detective Bradley R. Graham, Tacoma Police Department

Case of Marie Bobo

I am a Detective with the Tacoma, Washington Police Department assigned to the Special Assaults Unit. In January of this year I became involved in the case of State of Washington vs. Margaret M. Bobo, a case of criminal mistreatment of a vulnerable/elder adult.

The victim, 81-year old Marie Bobo, lived in a single family home in Tacoma, Washington. She retired from her civil service job nearly twenty years ago and lived solely on her retirement check. There is no record of her ever applying for, or receiving, any state public assistance.

On January 14th of this year, the victim's daughter, Margaret, made a 911 call to the Fire Department asking for assistance with her mother who had fallen in the house. Margaret told the dispatcher that she was unable to pick her mother up. When Fire/Rescue arrived, they found Marie, naked from the waist down, on the floor inside the home unable to move.

Fire Fighters had to remove the outer door from the hinges and climb over stacks of household trash that in places went from floor to ceiling. They found the elderly victim literally stuck to the trash by her own feces. Pieces of her skin were pulled from her body as they lifted her for transport to an area hospital. The home was filled with human feces and rodents. The home's other rooms were accessible only by crawling over piles of trash.

Police were summoned and responded to the hospital to interview the victim. The responding officer was required by hospital staff to don a protective suit because the victim had unidentified insect life coming out of wounds on her body. She was clearly disorientated and unable to give officers a clear picture of what happened.

The victim weighed 88 pounds. She was malnourished and dehydrated. She suffered from a condition called contracture of the legs and hips. This condition results when a limb has not been moved for a significant period of time. In this case, Ms. Bobo's legs and hips are stuck in the fetal position. She got this way from having been left, unmoved, for several months. The skin around her toes was blackened and dead. Any attempt to manipulate her legs is still painful to her. She had bedsores on her buttocks and elbows. Her skin was dry and scaly and began to come off as it was cleaned. The charge nurse reported that it most likely took several months without bathing to reach that condition.

There is no hope her legs will ever function again. There was concern that amputation might be necessary to prevent infection. Only now, after five months of therapy and evaluation, is she able to be placed in a reclining chair. The medical plan calls for treatment of the tendons in her legs. This will release them to the point of getting her into a wheelchair. This will give her something she has not experienced in over a year - mobility.

Interviews with the victim were limited due to her mental state. She was able to recall

that her daughter lives with her but doesn't spend the nights there. Her daughter visits her daily to bring her some food. She was not able to recall where she slept, when she last used a bathroom, when she last was able to move her legs or how much money she got from a retirement check she knew she received. She knew that her daughter took care of her money and her bills.

Her daughter was arrested for Criminal Mistreatment of a Dependant Person and Abandonment of a Dependant Person. In a post-arrest interview, the daughter admitted that she shared a joint bank account with her mother. A direct deposit of her mother's retirement check of approximately \$910.00 was made monthly to that account. She admitted to withdrawing cash from the account to care for her mother's bills.

Asked to account for the money withdrawn, the daughter said she used the money to repay a home loan in her mother's name, her mother's utility bills and food. Reminded of her mother's malnourished condition, she insisted that roughly \$200.00 monthly went to feed her mother. She further indicated that her mother wanted to contribute enough money to pay for the daughter's rent on an apartment across town.

The daughter indicated that she visits the home daily, in the afternoon, to bring her mother a meal consisting generally of soup, sandwiches and cookies. Asked what her mother did for meals when no one was there to help, she said her mom "isn't ever hungry for breakfast."

A check of the home's utility records showed that the home's power and water usage were significantly below normal usage. At times during the past year, there were months when the home showed no measurable water usage. The home's gas was shut off some time ago thereby cutting off the primary source of heat.

A complete inspection of the home was not completed due to health concerns of those entering. The City's building inspector has been called in to evaluate.

Subpoenas to the victim's bank showed a shared account between the victim and the daughter. Records show that each month a retirement check was deposited into that account and on the same date the entire amount was withdrawn in cash. This left a constant balance of less of than \$5.00 in the checking account. The joint savings account showed a balance of 10 cents. The suspect does maintain a separate bank account at another bank that doesn't show any significant deposits corresponding to dates of withdrawals from the joint account. This leads us to believe the money taken out by the daughter was used for her own spending habits and not any organized savings effort.

Financial records show that in early 2000, at the age of 80, the victim was given a loan against her home for household repairs. The Deed shows the loan to be for twenty thousand dollars payable over a 25-year period. Her monthly payments on this loan were \$350.00 a month.

Proactive intervention in Aging Abuse by Law Enforcement is, at best, difficult. Last

year, Tacoma PD received approximately 175,000 calls for service. Nearly 2,000 offenses were reported to be against victims age 62 and older. When police must struggle to keep up with the reported crime, any proactive efforts will suffer. Most crimes-against-persons cases must be triaged by detectives to determine the level of solvability before investing time and resources into an investigation. Sadly, the threshold of what is solvable tends to be inversely proportionate to the increase in caseload.

I believe a big part of the solution lies in public awareness. We need to make people as focused to elder abuse issues as they are to child abuse. We must teach people with regular elder contact to be more attuned to the signs and symptoms of this problem. Educating letter carriers, power and utility meter readers, neighborhood shop owners, and beat cops could go along way towards early intervention and prevention.

Financial abuse is a particularly difficult case to work. The suspects are often relatives, close friends, or caregivers who have been given access to the funds, such as were in the Bobo case. 20 years of retirement payments and the bank account had a near-zero balance. Of additional concern has to be to the loan and the lack of guidance in her obtaining of it. An 80-year-old woman was given a 25-year home loan and her monthly payments were in excess of 30% of her monthly income. Were efforts made to see if she qualified for any public assistance programs to help with the home repairs? There must be a way to exercise some oversight against predatory lending agencies who see the elderly as an easy target.

In 15 years of law enforcement, I've never experienced the same roller coaster ride of emotions as I did in the Bobo case. I will never forget the images indelibly printed in my mind of that poor old woman living crippled in her own chamber of horrors and my bewilderment as to how this could have happened right in front of us.